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MISSISSIPPI NAMED SEMI-FINALIST
IN MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR BIO-SECURITY PROJECT

(Jackson, Mississippi) – Governor Haley Barbour and the Mississippi Congressional delegation announced today that Mississippi has been selected a semi-finalist as the U.S. Department of Homeland security evaluates where to build a multimillion-dollar animal disease research laboratory.

"Mississippians should be excited that our state is very much in the running to host and serve as a site for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, but we must realize this is only the first step," Governor Barbour said. "Mississippi is the best place to locate this critical facility and we will continue to work closely with the Bush Administration and our Congressional delegation to clearly demonstrate that fact."

"Mississippi being a semi-finalist comes as no surprise given the strong scientific team that has been assembled for this project. The biomedical research that is on going in our universities is world class. In our state we have the technical capacity and the intellectual prowess that makes us a perfect match for the NBAF project," Governor Barbour said.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said sites in 11 states were included in the semi-final selections; a total of 29 proposals were submitted. The department will send out additional requests for information tailored to assess the capabilities of each state's proposal and a final decision is expected in early 2007.

The three Mississippi sites – Hinds County near Byram, Madison County near Flora, and Rankin County near Brandon – had been submitted in March as possible locations for the high-security, maximum-safety federal facility that conducts research into foreign animal diseases, such as avian flu and foot and mouth disease, and develops countermeasures for potential bioterrorism.

Described by experts as having security "like a bank vault in a submarine," the new facility will replace the aging and increasingly costly Plum Island

Animal Disease Center on Long Island, New York, which was built in the 1950s.

The center would be a $500 million construction project scheduled to begin in 2008. When it opens in 2012, it would employ about 400 people, including more than 200 scientists as well as technicians and support staff making an average salary of about $75,000 per year and working in a half-million square feet of enclosed laboratory space on 150 acres. Annual payroll is expected to reach $30.5 million.

“Mississippians should be proud that our state was selected by the Department of Homeland Security as a semi-finalist for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility,” U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss., said. “Our success confirms the excellent reputation of our state universities and their partners for conducting reliable scientific research of national importance. I applaud the efforts of the Governor and the team Mississippi has assembled in completing this first step in the process. I will continue to work with both state and local officials to ensure that Mississippi receives full consideration."

U.S. Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., said, “The fact that Mississippi is a contender for this project reflects the progress we’ve made as a state, marketing ourselves more aggressively and showing the nation what facilities and skills Mississippians have to offer. Senator Cochran and I have worked hard to secure significant federal support for our state’s higher education system with a special emphasis on our research capabilities. Certainly initiatives like this one are attracted by this commitment and could benefit from it.”

U.S. Rep. Benny Thompson, D-Miss., said, “Today, we moved one step closer to securing a major homeland security asset for our state and nation. With the collective participation of the entire metro-Jackson community, we now have a real opportunity to showcase our best and brightest. As this process moves forward, Mississippi’s application will be strengthened by the contributions of a diverse cross-section of participants at every level. I look forward to working with our congressional delegation and state officials to make that happen.”

U.S. Rep. Chip Pickering, R-Miss., said, “Today’s announcement shows that the Department of Homeland Security recognizes the value of the Mississippi sites to provide the infrastructure, research partnerships, labor,

security, and quality of life components necessary for a facility of this type. I'm confident Mississippi's strengths will shine during the site visits and our pitch to Homeland Security will be well received."

U.S. Rep. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said, "Our state has put together an impressive partnership of experts in a bid to locate the NBAF facility in the Jackson area. The project also has strong bipartisan political support. We are well-positioned to be a focal point in this effort to protect the public and the agricultural industry from the threat of biological attack."

Mississippi's partners in the Gulf States Bio and Agro-Defense Consortium include the Governor's Office, Mississippi Development Authority, Mississippi's Congressional Delegation, and the Metro Jackson Chamber of Commerce. Also partnering in the effort are The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy, Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson State University, Tulane University Primate Research Center, University of Texas Medical Branch, Iowa State University, and facility management by Batelle Memorial Institute, a not-for-profit trust based in Columbus, Ohio, that operates one of the world's largest research enterprises and manages or co-manages five Department of Energy-sponsored labs. Batelle already manages several national bio-safety level laboratories.

The center would have a Biosafety Level 4 (BL-4) designation—the nation's highest rating, one currently held by The Centers for Disease Control in downtown Atlanta.

The Department of Homeland Security's major site selection criteria include access to university research and facilities; location near an international airport; quality of life for top scientific researchers including housing, schools, cultural events, recreation and entertainment; and ability to support and absorb a major research institution.

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